
Understanding Skin Problems

Acne, Eczema, Psoriasis and
Related Conditions



LINDA PAPADOPOULOS AND CARL WALKER
London Metropolitan University, UK



Understanding Skin Problems

Understanding Illness and Health

Many health problems and worries are strongly influenced by our thoughts and feelings. These exciting new books, written by experts in the psychology of health, are essential reading for sufferers, their families and friends.

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The series is edited by JANE OGDEN, Reader in Health Psychology, Guy's, King's and St Thomas' School of Medicine, King's College London, UK

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About the authors

DR LINDA PAPADOPOULOS is a Reader in Psychology at London Metropolitan University with specific research interests in the field of psychodermatology, and she has consistently published in this field. Dr Papadopoulous is a chartered health and counselling psychologist who has worked in primary care settings as well as maintaining her research group. She also has extensive media commitments, appearing regularly on television and writing her monthly column in *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

CARL WALKER is a Research Psychologist at London Metropolitan University where he is currently finishing a PhD in psychodermatology. He graduated in biology from Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London. His research focuses on body image and disfigurement and the use of psychological therapy in medical contexts. Within this field, he has a particular interest in the psychological aspects of child skin disease and the family.

Introduction



It is estimated that approximately 20 per cent of the UK population suffers with some form of skin disease at any given time, with eczema, acne and infectious disorders (e.g. athlete's foot) being the most commonly presenting complaints to general practitioners (GPs) and dermatologists.

Approximately 15–20 per cent of a GP's workload and 6 per cent of hospital outpatient referrals are for skin problems. Skin disease is also the most frequent reason for sick leave from work and is the most common industrial disease (Gawkrodger, 1997). Yet, in a society where there is so much emphasis placed on looks and appearance, there seems to be little attention given to the psychological effects of skin conditions and the challenges faced by those who suffer from them. From dealing with staring and rude comments to thinking about how to ask the doctor for a referral, people may experience different challenges when living with their skin condition. Unfortunately however, since skin diseases are rarely life-threatening, their impact is often minimised both by family members and by health professionals. As a consequence, a person may feel that they aren't allowed to be upset or even to take time out to cope with their condition. We hope that this book will enable people to address their concerns in a constructive and helpful way. This book addresses principles that are pertinent to all skin diseases, but focuses specifically on acne, eczema, psoriasis and vitiligo, drawing on patients' accounts of living with and coping with their skin disease.

How is skin disease different from other conditions?

Over our years of experience in counselling patients in medical settings it has always struck us how illnesses (and consequently their impact) are assessed in terms of their severity. The assumption is made that the more severe a condition is, the more severe the psychological impact will be on the patient. As a consequence, skin diseases that are rarely life-threatening or physically handicapping, are thought not to pose much of a problem for those that experience them. The fact of the matter is that the severity of a condition is not directly related to how we cope